

ESCHATOLOGY
&
1 CORINTHIANS::
THE CHURCH IN THE ESCHATON

by
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... Pray, then, in this way;
"Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven...
- Matthew 6:9,10

... He answered them and said,
"The kingdom of God is not coming with
signs to be observed; nor will they say,
'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!'
For, behold, the kingdom of God is in
your midst.
- Luke 17: 20b-21 ¹

As Jesus walked out of the pages of the Old Testament and onto the New Testament scene Israel's promised Messiah presented some concepts that His first century audience found hard to grasp. They expected a leader that would usher them into a new age, into the age of the Latter Times.² But the Day of the Lord proved not to be a momentary shift from the Present Times to the Last Times, and to this many in His audience could not adjust to.

It seemed to be in the Will of God to overlap this present evil age³ and the age to come, or the Eschaton.⁴ With inception of the Church⁵ and the beginning of the Eschaton,⁶ at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the believers in Israel's Messiah found themselves in a unique and un-

expected position, on one side surrounded by world and its troubles and on the other side the kingdom (though invisible for the present moment) and its promises. (see dia. A)

Thiselton insists that when addressing the phenomenon of the first letter to the Corinthian assembly one must interpret it with this presupposition in mind, the present overlapping of "Ages."⁷ Though I may differ on the amount of weight given this presupposition throughout the book (the system tends to weaken when dealing with the spiritual gifts controversy⁸) it does throw a considerable amount of light on many of the passages once referred to as answers to Gnostic questions.

The traditional Eschatological passages are found in the fifteenth chapter and parts of chapters two and three. The fact is that many of the commentaries do not deal with First Corinthians eschatologically except in these areas.⁹

Thiselton and Vos tend to use first Corinthian 4:8 as a proof-text to the Corinthian belief in a realized eschatology.¹⁰ It's a good verse but a bit too weak to support an entire interpretive system. I would be more inclined to appeal to Jesus' (and Paul's) consistently two-fold description of the kingdom.¹¹

Vos writes regarding this view of Pauline theology:

The eschatology, without losing touch with history, nevertheless, owing to the large sweep of its historical reach, becomes philosophico-theological. It no longer forms one item in the sum-total of revealed teaching, but draws within its circle as a correlated and eschatologically-complexioned parts practically all of the fundamental tenets of Pauline Christianity. 12

Consequently, when dealing with various moral/problematic questions, as in Paul's question/answer-report/reply sections,¹³ if understood in the proper Sitz em leben can easily be illuminated. An example is the Corinthian's arrogant attitude to an individual co-habiting (to use current parlance) with his father's wife.¹⁴ Thiselton explains:

I have examined this section in detail elsewhere, and underlined the importance of the point that Paul's censure relates not primarily to the man in question, but to the fact that the community seemed pleased with the situation. "You are arrogant (pephusiōmenoi este). Ought you not rather to mourn?".... The self-styled "spiritual" men at Corinth (not perhaps without some mixture of motives) wished to parade their new-found freedom as a bold testimony to their eschatological status. 15

The Corinthians were a church, as most churches, that had a problem maintaining a balance in view of its position in the kingdom. Often waivering toward an "over-realized" eschatology and thereby abandoning social etiquette (and an understandable witness to the world)¹⁶ or at times

crashing into partisan cliques and thereby violating
Christ's Eschatological Rule :

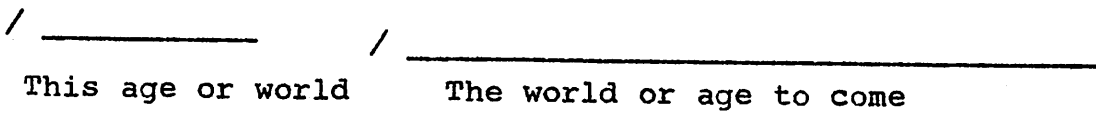
A new commandment I give to you, that
you love one another, even as I have loved
you, that you also love one another. By
this all men will know that you are My
disciples, if you have love for one another.¹⁷

Finally, regarding the traditional eschatological
sections (i.e., chapters 2,3 and 15) most commentators
have used these sections to erect a good portion of their
eschatological understanding (particularly chapter 15). It
will be noted however these chapters (especially 15) are not
designed to present new material, but to re-establish
accepted fact.¹⁸ (Thiselton notes that some of the
Corinthians denial of a resurrection may be due to their
belief that they were experiencing the completion or the
fulness of the kingdom/resurrection age.)¹⁹

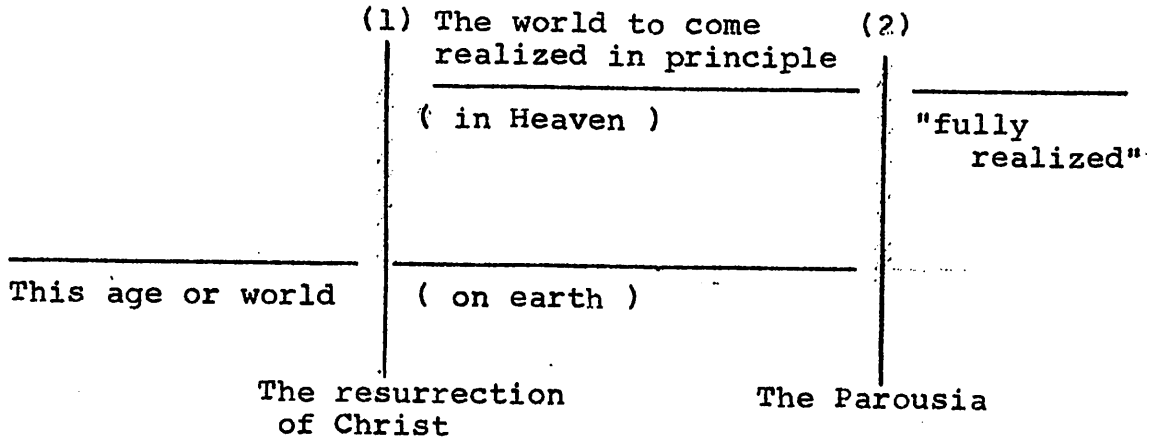
If the church is to be understood as living in the
Eschaton then the book of first Corinthians must be under-
stood as a guideline for the churches present experience
in the Eschaton.

DIAGRAM A. 20

I. The Original Scheme (OT)



II. The Modified Scheme (NT)



FOOTNOTES

- 1 Dr. Morosco, Eschatology Class Notes, 1980.
- 2 Dr. Morosco, Eschatology Syllabus. p.7.
- 3 Matthew 11:16.
- 4 The Acts of The Apostles 2:16,17.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Dr. Morosco, Eschatology Class Notes, 1980.
- 7 Anthony C. Thiselton. "Realized Eschatology at Corinth." New Testament Studies. 17 (1970-1971).
- 8 Ibid. pp. 522-523.
- 9 F. W. Grosheide. "Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians." The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953.
William Orr and James Arthur Walther. "1 Corinthians." The Anchor Bible. 32. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976.
- 10 Geerhardus Vos. The Pauline Eschatology. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972, p.26
Thiselton, p. 510.
- 11 Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 6:10; 16:28; Lk. 17:20, 21; Col 1:13
- 12 Vos, p.11
- 13 1 Cor 4-8, 12, 15, 16.
- 14 1 Cor 5:1ff
- 15 Vos, pp.515-516.

(Footnotes, Continued)

¹⁶ 1 Cor 14:34

¹⁷ Jn 13:34,35

¹⁸ Thiselton, p524.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Vos, p.38.

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